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Files
Bowen,

Date 11 May 54

From Sherman Kent

Comments

~~DE~~ Dear Allen

Wayne thought you would be interested in this.

I'm sorry that it has to be classified - but at least you can open it in the presence of your secretary.

SK

005085

For [illegible]
with all kind regards.

SECRET

*How the logic of the estimating process failed, in September 1962, to apprehend an illogical Soviet policy decision.*

# A CRUCIAL ESTIMATE RELIVED

**Sherman Kent**

Special National Intelligence Estimate 85–3–62, entitled "The Military Buildup in Cuba," became the official pronouncement of the United States Intelligence Board on 19 September 1962. This estimate was undertaken when reporting from Cuba began to indicate a steep acceleration in Soviet deliveries of military supplies to Cuba. The tempo of its production was more rapid than "routine," but far less rapid than "crash." At the time it was completed, those of us engaged in it felt that its conclusions A and B represented a basic analysis of the situation. Here they are:

A. We believe that the USSR values its position in Cuba primarily for the political advantages to be derived from it, and consequently that the main purpose of the present military buildup in Cuba is to strengthen the Communist regime there against what the Cubans and the Soviets conceive to be a danger that the US may attempt by one means or another to overthrow it. The Soviets evidently hope to deter any such attempt by enhancing Castro's defensive capabilities and by threatening Soviet military retaliation. At the same time, they evidently recognize that the development of an offensive military base in Cuba might provoke US military intervention and thus defeat their present purpose.

B. In terms of military significance, the current Soviet deliveries are substantially improving air defense and coastal defense capabilities in Cuba. Their political significance is that, in conjunction with the Soviet statement of 11 September, they are likely to be regarded as ensuring the continuation of the Castro regime in power, with consequent discouragement to the opposition at home and in exile. The threat inherent in these developments is that, to the extent that the Castro regime thereby gains a sense of security at home, it will be emboldened to become more aggressive in fomenting revolutionary activity in Latin America.

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And conclusions C and D were an attempt to predict what further developments might occur. They read:

> C. As the buildup continues, the USSR may be tempted to establish in Cuba other weapons represented to be defensive in purpose, but of a more "offensive" character: e.g., light bombers, submarines, and additional types of short-range surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs). A decision to provide such weapons will continue to depend heavily on the Soviet estimate as to whether they could be introduced without provoking a US military reaction.
>
> D. The USSR could derive considerable military advantage from the establishment of Soviet medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba, or from the establishment of a Soviet submarine base there. As between these two, the establishment of a submarine base would be the more likely. Either development, however, would be incompatible with Soviet practice to date and with Soviet policy as we presently estimate it. It would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in US–Soviet relations than the USSR has displayed thus far, and consequently would have important policy implications with respect to other areas and other problems in East–West relations.

As is quite apparent, the thrust of these paragraphs was that the Soviets would be unlikely to introduce strategic offensive weapons into Cuba. There is no blinking the fact that we came down on the wrong side. When the photographic evidence of 14 October was in, there was the proof.

Soon after the consequent crisis had subsided, a number of investigations were set in train aiming to understand why the estimate came out as it did. What follows are my own thoughts on the subject and some philosophical generalizations about the business of intelligence estimating. My central thought is that no intelligence mechanism imaginable can be anything like one hundred percent sure of predicting correctly the actions of a foreign government in a situation such as this one was. If similar situations develop in the future and if their course must be estimated from the same sort of evidentiary base, these situations too are bound to be susceptible to the same sort of misjudgment.

*The Estimating Machine*

Although many of our readers are aware of the process by which National Intelligence Estimates are produced, it is perhaps desirable to set forth again the general ground-rules.

When time allows (and it did in the case of the Cuba estimate) the process is fairly complicated; it involves a lot of thought and planning at the outset, a lot of research and writing in the intelligence research organizations of the military and the State Department, a drafting by the ablest staff in the business, and a painstaking series of interagency meetings devoted to review and coordination. Before it gets the final USIB imprimatur a full-dress NIE goes down an assembly line of eight or more stations. At each it is supposed to receive (and almost always does) the attention of a highly knowledgeable group. The Cuba estimate passed through all these stations.

The laborious procedure has seemed to me worth while if for no other reason than that it is aimed at achieving three important goals: the production of a paper tailored exactly to the requirements of the policy consumer; the full deployment of every relevant intelligence resource (documents and knowledgeable people) within the community; and the attainment of a best agreed judgment about imponderables, or lacking unanimity the isolation and identification of dissenting opinion.

In any of the major estimates it would not be difficult to demonstrate that a thousand, perhaps thousands of, people in intelligence work scattered all over the world had made their modest witting or unwitting contribution to the finished job. Foreign service officers, attachés, clandestine operators and their operatives, eavesdroppers, document procurers, interrogators, observers, "photographers" and the photo interpreters, reporters, researchers, sorters, indexers, reference and technical specialists, and so on have been gathering, forwarding, arranging, and sifting the factual stuff upon which the estimate rests. Final responsibility for the form and substance of the ultimate blue book rests with far fewer, but a good number just the same. These are the estimators throughout the community, including the staff of the Office of National Estimates, the DCI's Board of National Estimates, and the USIB principals themselves.

So much for what might be called the physique of the process: it has also its purely intellectual aspects. Like any solid conceptual construction, the National Intelligence Estimate

is prepared in rough accordance with the procedures of the scientific method.

In very general and, I fear, over-simplified terms, the process goes like this. After a confrontation of the problem and some decisions as to how it should be handled, there is a ransacking of files and minds for all information relating to the problem; and an evaluation, analysis, and digestion of this information. There are emergent hypotheses as to the possible aggregate meaning of the information; some emerged before, some after its absorption. No one can say whence come these essential yeasts of fruitful thought. Surely they grow best in a medium of knowledge, experience, and intuitive understanding. When they unfold, they are checked back against the facts, weighed in the light of the specific circumstances and the analysts' general knowledge and understanding of the world scene. Those that cannot stand up fall; those that do stand up are ordered in varying degrees of likelihood.

*The Search into Uncertainty*

As an NIE begins to take form it carries three kinds of statements. The first is easily disposed of; it is the statement of indisputable fact ("The Soviets have a long-range heavy jet bomber, the Bison"). The second and third kinds do not carry any such certainty; each rests upon a varying degree of uncertainty. They relate respectively (a) to things which are knowable but happen to be unknown to us, and (b) to things which are not known to anyone at all.

As an example of the former, we have seen the Bison up close and from afar, photographed it in the air and on the ground, listened to it and timed it in flight; but no reliable source we have access to has had his hands on one or put one through its paces. Its performance characteristics are accordingly a matter of calculation or estimate. Likewise, although some Soviet official knows with perfect assurance how many Bisons there are, we do not. Our calculation of Bison order of battle is an estimate, an approximation.

Over the years our estimates of these knowable but unknown things have probably come closer and closer to the objective fact, but it is sobering to realize that there is still a notable discrepancy between the CIA and Air Force estimates of oper-

ational Bisons, and that only last year our seemingly solid estimate of Bear order of battle had to be revised upwards some fifteen percent.

It is worth noting here that matters far less esoteric than Bear order of battle can and often do present literally unsolvable problems. An innocent might think that such knowable things as the population of Yemen, the boundaries of Communist China, the geodetic locus of Russian cities, and thousands of other obvious matters of fact could be had for the asking. Not only can they not be had for the asking, they cannot be had at all. The reason is, of course, either that no one has ever tried to find them out, or that those who have tried have approached the problem from different angles with different methodologies and gotten different answers, of which no single one can be cited as the objective fact.

The third kind of statement, in (b) above, represents an educated guess at something literally unknowable by any man alive. Characteristically it often deals in futures and with matters well beyond human control: Will Nkrumah be with us for the next two years? five years? Or it deals with matters under human control but upon which no human decision has been taken: How many Blinders will the Soviets have five years hence? What kind of antimissile capability? What will be their stance in Cuba next year? It may be that the Soviet leaders have temporized with these issues, agreed to go planless for another six or eighteen months. Or it may be that they have decided, but at this time next year will drastically alter this year's decision. Ask almost anyone what he plans to do with his 1965 holiday and see what you get. If you do get anything, write it down and ask him the same question a year from now.

If NIEs could be confined to statements of indisputable fact the task would be safe and easy. Of course the result could not then be called an estimate. By definition, estimating is an excursion out beyond established fact into the unknown—a venture in which the estimator gets such aid and comfort as he can from analogy, extrapolation, logic, and judgment. In the nature of things he will upon occasion end up with a conclusion which time will prove to be wrong. To recognize this as inevitable does not mean that we estimators are reconciled

to our inadequacy; it only means we fully realize that we are engaged in a hazardous occupation.

It has been murmured that a misjudgment such as occurred in the Cuba SNIE warrants a complete overhaul of our method of producing estimates. In one sense of the word "method," this cannot be done. As indicated earlier, the method in question is the one which students reared in the Western tradition have found to be best adapted to the search for truth. It is the classical method of the natural sciences, retooled to serve the far less exact disciplines of the so-called science of human activity—strategy, politics, economics, sociology, etc. This is our method; we are stuck with it, unless we choose to forsake it for the "programmer" and his computer or go back to the medicine man and his mystical communion with the All-Wise.

What can be done is to take a hard look at those stages of the method where it is most vulnerable and where a relaxation of vigilance or an undue inflexibility may lead to error in judgment. First consider the so-called evaluation of the "facts."

*The Matter of Mental Set*

In our business we are as likely to be faced by the problem of a plethora of raw intelligence as by one of its paucity. In many of our tasks we have so large a volume of data that no single person can read, evaluate, and mentally file it all. It gets used in a finished intelligence study only through being handled along the line by a group of people who divide the labor. Obviously the individuals of this group are not identical in talent or anything else, and each brings to the task his own character, personality, and outlook on life. There is no way of being sure that as they read and evaluate they all maintain the same standards of criticism or use common criteria of value and relevance.

Merely as an example of what I am saying: it could have been that half a dozen such readers were inclined to believe that the Soviets would put strategic weapons into Cuba and another half-dozen inclined to believe the opposite. In some measure the subsequent use of a given document depends upon who handles it first and gives it an evaluation. It could be

that a valuable piece of information falls into disrepute because its early readers did not believe its story. The obverse is also possible—that an incorrect story should gain great currency because of being wholly believed by wishful critics. It is a melancholy fact of life that neither case is a great rarity, that man will often blind himself to truth by going for the comforting hypothesis, by eschewing the painful.

What is true of the evaluation of raw intelligence at the reporting or desk officer level is generally true all along the line. The main difference between the early evaluation and that at the national estimates level is the quantity evaluated, not necessarily the quality of the evaluation. The relatively few people on the national estimates staff and board cannot, indeed do not try to, read all incoming reports. They read and appraise what survives the first few stages of the winnowing-out process—still a formidable amount of paper. For the rest they rely upon the word of the specialists who have handled the material in the first instance. The senior estimates people have had more experience than the average and their skills are probably greater, but they are still men with normal human fallibilities.

In last analysis these fallibilities lie in a man's habits of thought. Some minds when challenged respond with a long-harbored prejudice, some with an instantaneous cliché. Some minds are fertile in the generation of new hypotheses and roam freely and widely among them. Other minds not merely are sterile in this respect but actively resist the new idea.

Any reputable and studious man knows the good and evil of the ways of thought. No worthy soul consciously nourishes a prejudice or willfully flashes a cliché; everyone knows the virtues of open-mindedness; no one boasts imperviousness to a new thought. And yet even in the best minds curious derelictions occur.

*The Data on Cuba*

I do not believe, however, that any such derelictions occurred in the matter of evaluating the evidence on Cuba. What little data we had prior to 19 September I am sure we weighed and measured with open minds.

What was this evidence? To begin with, there was of course no information that the Soviets had decided to deploy strategic missiles to Cuba and indeed no indication suggesting such a decision. Moreover, months after that decision had been reached, and during the period when the estimate was being drafted and discussed, there was still no evidence that the missiles were in fact moving to their emplacement. With the benefit of hindsight one can go back over the thousand and more bits of information collected from human observers in the six months ending 14 October and pick out a few—a very few—which indicated the possible presence of strategic missiles. The report of CIA's Inspector General says: "It was not until shortly after mid-September that a few ground observer reports began coming in which were specifically descriptive or suggestive of the introduction into Cuba of Soviet offensive weapons."

The IG goes on to list the "handful" which "can be related" to these weapons. The list comes to eight. Of these I would agree that no more than two or possibly three should have stopped the clock. None of these was available before the crucial estimate was put to bed. Even if they had been here in time and even if we had intuitively felt (and a notable among us did so feel) that such weapons were on the way, these three bits of evidence would probably not, taken in the context of the other thousands, have been seized on as pointing to the truth. In the mass of human observation and reporting there were items to support or destroy almost any hypothesis one could generate.

Nor did the aerial photography of September dissipate the uncertainty. Not only did it fail to spot the ominous indicators of missile emplacement but over and over again it made fools of ground observers by proving their reports inaccurate or wrong. The moment of splendor for the U–2s, cameras, film, and PIs when finally the sites and associated equipment were photographed and identified had not yet arrived with the close of the business day of 19 September.

Thus of the two classical invitations to error in the estimating business, we cannot be said to have fallen for the first: I refer of course to the neglect or wishful misevaluation of evidence because it does not support a preconceived hypothesis.

Though perhaps tempted, we also did *not* kick the problem under the rug. We did ask ourselves the big question, "Are the Soviets likely to use Cuba as a strategic base?" We asked ourselves the next echelon of questions, "Are they likely to base submarines, light bombers (IL–28s), heavier bombers, and long-range missiles there?" Our answers are cited above.

*The Logic of Intent*

How could we have misjudged? The short answer is that, lacking the direct evidence, we went to the next best thing, namely information which might *indicate* the true course of developments. We looked hard at the fact of the Soviet military buildup in Cuba for *indications* of its probable final scale and nature. We concluded that the military supplies piling into Cuba indicated a Soviet intent to give Castro a formidable defensive capability—so formidable as to withstand anything but a major military effort on the part of an attacker. We felt that the Soviet leaders believed the worldwide political consequences of such an effort would be recognized in the United States and would be the strongest possible deterrent to U.S. military moves to overthrow Castro. Obviously we did not go on to argue that the Soviets might think they could raise the deterrent still higher by supplying the Cubans with long-range missiles, which they would still proclaim to be purely defensive.

As noted, however, we did consider the matter. And in answering the questions that we posed ourselves on the likelihood of the Soviets' building Cuba into what this country would have to regard as a strategic base, we called upon another range of indicators. These were indicators derivable from precedents in Soviet foreign policy.

When we reviewed once again how cautiously the Soviet leadership had threaded its way through other dangerous passages of the Cold War; when we took stock of the sense of outrage and resolve evinced by the American people and government since the establishment of a Communist regime in Cuba; when we estimated that the Soviets must be aware of these American attitudes; and when we then asked ourselves would the Soviets undertake the great risks at the high odds—and in Cuba of all places—the indicator, the pattern of Soviet foreign policy, shouted out its negative.

With hindsight one may speculate that during the winter and early spring of 1962, when the Soviets were making their big Cuba decisions, they examined the posture of the United States and thought they perceived a change in it. Is it possible that they viewed our acceptance of setbacks in Cuba (the Bay of Pigs), in Berlin (the wall), and in Laos as evidence of a softening of U.S. resolve? Perhaps they did, and on this basis they estimated the risks of putting missiles into Cuba as acceptably low. Perhaps, when they contemplated the large strategic gains which would accrue if the operation succeeded, their estimate of the U.S. mood was wishfully nudged in this direction. And perhaps again, to close the circuit, they failed to estimate at all the consequences of being themselves faced down in a crisis. If all these speculations are correct—and there is persuasive argument to sustain them—even in hindsight it is extremely difficult for many of us to follow their inner logic or to blame ourselves for not having thought in parallel with them.

On 15 October we realized that our estimate of the Soviets' understanding of the mood of the United States and its probable reaction was wrong. On 28 October we realized that the Soviets had realized they had misjudged the United States. In between we verified that our own feeling for the mood of the United States and its probable reaction had been correct. In a way our misestimate of Soviet intentions got an *ex post facto* validation.

*Ways Out We Did Not Take*

In brooding over an imponderable—like the probable intentions of the Soviet Union in the context of Cuba—there is a strong temptation to make no estimate at all. In the absence of directly guiding evidence, why not say the Soviets might do this, they might do that, or yet again they might do the other—and leave it at that? Or like the news commentators, lay out the scenario as it has unwound to date and end with a "time alone will tell"? This sort of thing has the attractions of judicious caution and an unexposed neck, but it can scarcely be of use to the policy man and planner who must prepare for future contingencies.

Even more tempting than no estimate is the "worst case" estimate. This consists of racking up all the very worst

things the adversary is capable of doing and estimating that he may undertake them all, irrespective of the consequences to his own larger objectives. If one estimates thus and if one is believed by the planner, then it follows that the latter need never be taken by unpleasant surprise.

Engaging in these worst-case exercises may momentarily cheer the estimator. No one can accuse him of nonchalance to potential danger; he has signaled its existence at each of the points of the compass; congressional investigators will have lean pickings with him. But in all likelihood a worse fate awaits. Either his audience will tire of the cry of wolf and pay him no heed when he has really bad news to impart, or it will be frightened into immobility or a drastically wrong policy decision.

It was tempting in the matter of Cuba to go for the worst case: but in the days before 19 September we knew that the evidence would not sustain such an estimate, and our reading of the indicators led us in the opposite direction.

*Why No Revision?*

If wrong as of 19 September, why did we not put things to rights before the 14 October photographs? Why did we not recall and modify the estimate when the early ground observer reports reached us or when we finally got the photo of the inbound Soviet ship with its deck cargo of crated IL-28s? Could we not have repaired the damage a week or so in advance of 14 October and given the policy-maker the advantage of this precious time?

In the first place, these pre-14 October data almost certainly would not, indeed should not, have caused the kind of shift of language in the key paragraphs that would have sounded the tocsin. Of themselves and in context they should not have overpowered all to the contrary and dictated a one-hundred-eighty-degree change to "The Soviets are almost certainly developing Cuba as a strategic base right now." The most they should have contributed to a new version would have been in the direction of softening the original "highly unlikely" and adding a sentence or two to note the evidence, flag a new uncertainty, and signal the possible emergence of a dangerous threat. If we had recalled the estimate or issued a memo to

its holders in early October we would have had a better record on paper, but I very much doubt that whatever in conscience we could have said would have galvanized high echelons of government to crash action.

In the second place, it is not as if these new data had no egress to the world of policy people except through National Intelligence Estimates. The information was current intelligence when it came in and it promptly went out to the key customers as such. This is of course the route that most, if not all, important items of intelligence follow. That constituent part of an NIE that I earlier referred to as the range of knowable things that are known with a high degree of certainty is often very largely made up of yesterday's current intelligence.

In the multi-compartmented intelligence business, two compartments are at issue—an estimates compartment and one for current intelligence. They are peopled by two quite separate groups and follow quite different lines of work. Nevertheless, there is the closest interrelationship between them. The current intelligence people handle almost minute by minute the enormous volume of incoming stuff, evaluate it, edit it, and disseminate it with great speed. The estimates people work on a longer-range subject matter, hopefully at a more deliberate pace, and make their largest contributions in the area of judicious speculation. NIEs are produced at the rate of 50 to 80 a year; individual current intelligence items at that of some ten thousand a year. The current people look to estimates as the correct medium for pulling together and projecting into the future the materials that continuously flow in. The estimators for their part rely on the current people to keep alert for news that will modify extant estimates.

The estimators do themselves keep the keenest sort of watch for this kind of news. Indeed the estimates board members and staff chiefs start every working day with a consideration of new information that might require revision of a standing NIE. But the board feels that certain criteria should be met before it initiates a new estimate. These are: (1) The subject matter of the estimate must be of considerable current importance. (The situation in Blanka was important at the time of our last estimate on the subject, but it is not very

important now; hence today's news, which may give the lie to major portions of the Blanka estimate, will not occasion its formal revision.) (2) The new evidence must be firm and must indicate a significant departure from what was previously estimated. (We would not normally recall an estimate to raise a key "probably" to an "almost certainly" nor to change an estimated quantity by a few percentage points. Unless we adhere to these criteria and let current intelligence carry its share of the burden, very few NIEs could be definitely buttoned up, and those which had been would have to be reopened for almost daily revisions. Maybe this is the way we should direct our future effort; some of our critics seem to imply as much. Myself, I think not.)

*The Enemy's Viewpoint*

Some of our critics have suggested that we would have avoided the error if we had done a better job of putting ourselves in the place of the Soviet leadership—that if we had only looked out on the world scene with their eyes and thought about it the way they did we would not have misread indicators and all would have been clear. Upon occasion this proposition is made in a way to suggest that its articulator feels that he has given birth to a brand new idea. "Your trouble," he says, "is that you do not seem to realize you are dealing with Russian Communists and a Soviet government policy problem." As such statements are made, I must confess to a quickening of pulse and a rise in temperature. I have wondered if such people appear before pastry cooks to tell them how useful they will find something called "wheat flour" in their trade.

If there is a first rule in estimating the probable behavior of the other man, it is the rule to try to cast yourself in his image and see the world through his eyes. It is in pursuit of this goal that intelligence services put the highest premium on country-by-country expertise, that they seek out and hire men who have deeply studied and experienced a given nation's ways of life, that they procure for these men daily installments of information on the latest developments in the area of their specialty. To the extent that objectivity of judgment about the other man's probable behavior is the crux of

the intelligence business, to that extent is the importance of living the other man's life recognized and revered.

Since at least World War I intelligence services have from time to time set a group of individuals apart and instructed them to think of themselves as the enemy's general staff. Their task as a red team is to ponder and act out the way the enemy will respond to situations as they develop. The idea seems to be that by the creation of an artificial frame—sometimes going to the lengths of letting the personnel in question wear the enemy's uniform and speak his sort of broken English—you will get a more realistic appreciation of the enemy's probable behavior than without the frills. It does not necessarily follow.

Consider the case of one intelligence service that created such a unit to simulate a Kremlin staff. It not only assigned some of its own officers but also employed the talents of some real one-time Communists. This latter move was regarded as the new "something" to cap all similar previous games. In a short time all members of the group became spirited dialecticians and as such were able to give Soviet problems impeccable Marxist solutions—to which, however, a Stalin, a Malenkov, or a Khrushchev would not have given the time of day. This particular exercise always seemed to me to have reached a new high in human fatuity. Five James Burnhams may afford insights into the working of Communist minds, but by no means necessarily into those particular minds that are in charge of Soviet policy.

Of course we did not go in for this sort of thing. We relied as usual on our own Soviet experts. As normally, they did try to observe and reason like the Soviet leadership. What they could not do was to work out the propositions of an aberrant faction of the leadership to the point of foreseeing that this faction's view would have its temporary victory and subsequent defeat.

*The Determinants of Action*

Within certain limits there is nothing very difficult or esoteric about estimating how the other man will probably behave in a given situation. In hundreds of cases formal estimates (NIEs, for example) have quite correctly—and many

times boldly and almost unequivocally—called the turn. Behind such judgments a large number of subjudgments are implicit. The other man will act as diagnosed because (1) he is in his right mind or at least he is not demonstrably unhinged; (2) he cannot capriciously make the decision by himself—at a minimum it will have to be discussed with advisers, and in nondictatorial governments it will have to stand the test of governmental and popular scrutiny; (3) he is aware of the power of traditional forces in his country, the generally accepted notions of its broad national interests and objectives, and the broad lines of policy which are calculated to protect the one and forward the other; (4) he is well informed.

To the extent that the "other man's" diplomatic missions and intelligence service can observe and report the things he must know prior to his decision, they have done so. He has read and pondered. These and other phenomena very considerably narrow the area of a foreign statesman's choice, and once thus narrowed it is susceptible to fairly sure-footed analysis by studious intelligence types. As long as all the discernible constants in the equation are operative the estimator can be fairly confident of making a sound judgment.

It is when these constants do not rule that the real trouble begins. It is when the other man zigs violently out of the track of "normal" behavior that you are likely to lose him. If you lack hard evidence of the prospective erratic tack and the zig is so far out of line as to seem to you to be suicidal, you will probably misestimate him every time. No estimating process can be expected to divine exactly when the enemy is about to make a dramatically wrong decision. We were not brought up to *under*estimate our enemies.

We missed the Soviet decision to put the missiles into Cuba because we could not believe that Khrushchev could make such a mistake. The fact that he did suggests that he might do so again, and this in turn suggests that perhaps we do not know some things about Soviet foreign policy decision-making that we should. We can be reasonably sure that certain forces which sometimes mislead Western foreign offices are seldom effective in the Soviet government. It is hard to believe, for example, that a Soviet foreign minister has to pay much heed to an unreasonable press, or to domestic pressure

groups, or, in the clutch, to the tender feelings of allies and neutrals.

If these well-known phenomena are not operative, what things are pressing a Soviet decision-maker towards a misestimate or an unfortunate policy decision? Obviously there are the fundamental drives inherent in Communism itself, but for these and the many things that go with them we, as diviners of Soviet policy, are braced. Are there perhaps other things of a lesser but nevertheless important nature that we have not fully understood and taken into account? I would like to suggest two that are closely linked: the role and functioning of Soviet embassies; and the role of intelligence and the philosophy of its collection, dissemination, and use. I would like to suggest that if we were to study these more deeply we might discover that many a Soviet misestimate and wrong-headed policy is traceable to the peculiar way in which the Soviets regard the mission of their ambassadors and the role they assign to their intelligence service.

*Whence the Decisive Intelligence?*

Obviously you cannot divine the functions of Dobrynin in Washington by studying Kohler in Moscow. Obviously a Soviet foreign mission has a quite different aura from other foreign missions we know a good deal about. But just what does a Soviet ambassador's job description look like? What does his government expect him to do beyond the normal diplomatic functions all ambassadors perform? What are his reporting functions, for example, and what kind of reporting staff does he have? What do he and they use as the raw materials for their purely informational dispatches—if indeed they write any?

Does the embassy staff proper compete with the KGB men in its reporting? We know that the top KGB dog in an embassy has a certain primacy over locally-domiciled Soviet citizens—including the ambassador. Does this primacy extend to reporting? Does the ambassador check his reports out with the KGB boss before sending them off? One thing we can be sure of—the KGB boss does not check *his* out with the ambassador. If ambassadorial reports are written and sent, who in Moscow reads them? Does Khrushchev? Do

the Presidium members? How do the highest echelons of government regard them as against, say, KGB or GRU clandestine reports and pilfered documents?

I find myself wondering a lot about Dobrynin. Suppose he had been informed of Moscow's estimate that the U.S. resolve had softened. Suppose he had agreed with this estimate in general. Is it possible that he would have gone on to agree with Moscow that the risks of sending strategic missiles to Cuba were entirely acceptable? It may be that he was not informed of this second estimate. But if he was so informed, I have great difficulty believing he would have agreed with it. Dobrynin is not a stupid man, and presumably he must have sensed that Castro's Cuba occupied some special place in American foreign policy thinking. Is it possible that, sensing the U.S. mood, he did not report it, and bolster his findings from what he read in the press and *Congressional Record,* what he heard on the radio and TV? Is it not more likely that he did send back such appraisals and that Moscow gave them little notice because they were not picked up in a fancy clandestine operation? Is it possible that the conspiratorial mind in the Kremlin, when faced with a choice of interpretations, will not lean heavily toward that which comes via the covert apparatus?

We have recently learned quite a lot about this apparatus and the philosophy of its operation and use. We think we have valid testimony from defectors who have come out of the Soviet and Satellite intelligence services that enormous importance is attached to clandestine procurement of documents containing the other man's secrets of state. We know that whatever overt research and analysis work is done in the Soviet government is *not* associated with the intelligence services. That the findings of this type of effort are denied the cachet of "intelligence" may rob them of standing, perhaps even of credibility.

We know that the Soviet practice of evaluating raw reports prior to dissemination is a pretty rough and ready affair (no alphabetical and numerical scale of estimated reliability, for example) that leaves the customer with a very free choice to believe or disbelieve. There is evidence to indicate that a KGB resident abroad has the right to address a report to a military

chief of staff or to the foreign minister or to Khrushchev himself. His boss in Moscow is in the chain of communication and can, of course, stop dissemination to the high-placed addressee. But if the resident in question is known to be a friend of the addressee the boss will think twice before he interferes. We are reasonably certain that there is a hot wire between Semichastny, chief of the KGB, and Chairman Khrushchev and that it is used to carry current raw intelligence between the two.

It is tempting to hope that some research and systematic reinterrogation of recent defectors, together with new requirements served on our own intelligence services, might turn up new insights into the Soviet process of decision-making. The odds are pretty strongly against it; and yet the—to us—incredible wrongness of the Soviet decision to put the missiles into Cuba all but compels an attempt to find out. Any light that can be thrown on that particular decision might lessen the chances of our misestimating the Soviets in a future case.